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*IRAQ, THE U.S., AND THE REGION
AFTER AN AMERICAN WITHDRAWAL*

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Abstract

The US will leave Iraq at some point, and needs to plan for this eventuality. There are many uncertainties involved, but taking them seriously is the first step toward being able craft a policy that will reduce the damage to us, Iraq, and the region. Even if the US stays until the violence is brought down, its departure will lead to the reopening of local and regional bargains because of the lack of enforcement. The greatest danger is that heightened civil war will lead to intervention by Iraq's neighbors, but the very possibility of large-scale violence creates possibilities for arrangements to avoid it because all of the parties know that they could lose badly if things get out of control.

Let us learn our lessons [from the Boer War]. Never, never, never believe any war will be smooth and easy, or that anyone who embarks on the voyage can measure the tides and hurricanes he will encounter.

Winston Churchill

It's just so hard for me to contemplate failure that I can't make the next step.

Senator John McCain

Despite past failures, our policy in Iraq will succeed "because it has to."

President George W. Bush¹

Introduction

The US will withdraw its troops from Iraq at some point, and when it does, if not earlier, the situation is likely to deteriorate badly. This could be a truly dreadful time--it could be a tsunami sweeping over the entire region. If the historical record is any guide, the post-withdrawal conflict will be prolonged unless there is massive intervention by an unopposed outside power. Civil wars tend to last longer than international ones because they are harder to end through negotiated settlements. Establishing a stable balance of power among the participants is very difficult. Somalia and Lebanon 1975-1991 may give a glimpse of what Iraq is likely to become. There, factions aligned and realigned rapidly, often in bewildering fashion. Since neither the Sunnis nor the Shia (nor the Kurds for that matter) are united, alliances of convenience could form across sectarian lines. Outsiders are likely to have great difficulty understanding what is happening, let alone exercising desired influence.

But outsiders are almost certain to both intervene in some way and to be deeply affected by events in Iraq. Even if a regional war does not eventuate, Shia-Sunni violence could well spread and destabilize several states, most of them friendly to the US; polarization and extremism of various forms are likely to persist; economies will suffer; anti-Americanism can increase.

¹ Churchill, *My Early Life* (London: Cooper, 1989), p.246; quoted in Todd Purdum, "Prisoner of Conscience," *Vanity Fair*, February 2007, p. 14; quoted in David Sanger, "Bush Adds Troops in Bid to Secure Iraq," *New York Times*, January 10, 2007.

Given the stakes and the lack of protection for the factions and neighbors who are defeated, no one is likely to accept defeat easily. Jordanians and Saudi Arabians, let alone the Iraqi Sunni, will do all they can to prevent the Sunnis from being crushed, while Iranians and the indigenous Shia will go to any length to see that the Sunni do not reestablish their previous dominance. Indicators of success are likely to be misleading because if it seems that one "side" is gaining, the other is likely to redouble its efforts. Furthermore, the "side" that does well is likely to lose cohesion as the sub-factions turn their attention from the other "side" to the competitors for power within its own group. Of course if the participants understand this they may compromise. But the enmity, mistrust, and inability to be sure that any agreement will stick militate against this, as does the propensity for groups that think they are gaining the upper hand to raise their aspirations and demands.

I can think of no good options, but we need to think through a range of possibilities. Eisenhower said "Plans are worthless, but planning is everything." (James Baker reports that his father similarly taught him the Five Ps--Prior Preparation Prevents Poor Performance.) Although we cannot anticipate exactly what will happen and rigid plans will not help, serious thinking can prepare us to respond thoughtfully, rapidly, and coherently. Of course in a better world this would be done by the government. Not only does it have the resources at its disposal, but the real point is to make the relevant officials think these things through, get to know each other's views, and be prepared for the eventualities, but this paper may at least point to what should be done.

The withdrawal and subsequent events may also be a good opportunity for rethinking the war on terror, and indeed is likely to require it. Who are we fighting, and why? What does victory--or defeat--consist of? What benchmarks are there for how we are doing? How can public support be maintained? Can/should we simply learn to live with a degree of terrorism, as the British did for years with the IRA? Can we develop the investments needed for a sustained struggle? What size and kind of military do we need?

Even leaving aside these broader questions, my own thinking is quite unformed and the following ideas are meant to stimulate discussion. I start by making general observations before turning to some

scenarios. Wild cards are of course possible and difficult to think about systematically, and I have not tried to include them. In this category would be large attacks against US forces in the region, major terrorism abroad, or any terrorism in the US. Unrelated events could also affect what the US would or could do: a significant recession, domestic scandals, paralyzing political stalemate. Abroad, the normal range of surprises, most of them unpleasant, could distract American attention and divert its resources. These cannot be planned for, but neither should we assume that everywhere else in the world will be smooth sailing.

Before proceeding further, let me mention that some might disagree with my premise and argue that the US is likely to keep a military force in Iraq indefinitely, mostly likely in isolated bases in the western desert. I very much doubt it. If we can conduct this redeployment only when things are calm, it will be a longer wait than the American public is likely to tolerate. More importantly, the idea that we would act as a guarantor, removed from being a source of friction within Iraq but ready to prevent large-scale violence, seems to me improbable. What exactly would our troops be doing? Presumably (in addition to the not-so-minor job of securing the bases) being prepared to step in if there is major violence. Leaving aside exactly what would constitute major violence, does this mean that we would be prepared to step in between two warring factions, getting shot at by both sides? Would we have done this in Basra recently? Alternatively, or in addition, we presumably would be there to prevent a coup by some faction. This conjures up troops going back into Baghdad to depose some non-legitimate (but armed) group. And if the violence is not large-scale, but just what we see now among various groups, would we stand aside despite the pleas from some Iraqis and unpleasant pictures on American TV? One can argue that the main function is deterrence--the player's knowledge that we could step in will keep them in line. Much as I'm a fan of this function of force, I'm skeptical that it would do the trick here. My sense is that this is a half-way house that looks a lot better when it is not closely examined.

Others may disagree with my premise because they think the current "surge," change in tactics, and growing cooperation with the Sunni tribes have put us on the path to success. Without denying the

real change, I remain highly skeptical. These measures, and especially the decision of many Sunnis to oppose the foreign fighters and other religious extremists, are heartening. But they do much more to counter the insurgency than to reduce the danger of civil war - too many observers conflate the two. They are in fact very different: policies to counter the insurgency could increase sectarian violence, and the anti-American Sunni insurgency could end without bringing peace and stability to the country. The basic question raised by our overthrow of Saddam always was who would rule in Iraq. Our military progress has not brought the Iraqis any closer to answering this question.

American Goals

The establishment of full democracy and civil liberties in Iraq is out of reach. American goals are then minimal peace and stability; a government that is friendly to the US--or at least not violently against it--and opposes terrorism; a state that is strong enough to fend off regional meddling but not so strong as to seek to coerce its neighbors or rebuild WMD. Even these may be unreachable, and the reduced objectives would be to limit damage to the US and the region, to keep the killing to a minimum, and to preserve some influence abroad and some unity at home. Perhaps most importantly, the US will need to see that Iraq does not become a base for terrorism. But this is particularly difficult because a strong central government is not likely to arise and civil wars breed terrorists.

American Means

The US has at its disposal the normal range of military, diplomatic, and economic instruments, but context is crucial. Although Vietnam does not provide a good analogy, it does remind us that the ultimate domino is American public opinion, which will strongly influence American policy and American options in the coming years. If Vietnam and other episodes like that following World War I are any guide, after Iraq the American public will strongly resist further armed interventions, if not generally assertive foreign policies. It is then not clear whether the US will be able to credibly threaten (or promise) to put forces back in Iraq to eliminate terrorist camps, prevent the domination of Iraq by Iran, or to separate combatants and maintain a modicum of stability. Even surgical air strikes (of dubious efficacy under most circumstances)

would probably carry significant domestic costs. Various forms of economic assistance constitute another set of tools the US could use, but their deployment will be inhibited by the budget deficit and the backlash against the enormous spending on Iraq.

Although it is a commonplace that the US will lose leverage as it withdraws, it may not be so simple or gloomy as that. Many of the players benefit from a significant American presence in the region; they and even others are likely to fear what can happen if we leave. Their incentives to cooperate with us in keeping things under control may then increase as it becomes clear that we are leaving. The obvious question is how we can encourage these perceptions and capitalize on them. We then need to consider how the US might exercise influence.

Organization of the US government. What is vital--and perhaps out of reach--is that the US government develop formal structures and informal networks that will allow it to operate more effectively than has been the case for the past several years. A post-occupation Iraq will confront us with problems of unusual complexity, ranging across the entire Middle East, with ramifications for South Asia and involving coordination with many countries such as Russia, the PRC, Israel, and those in Europe. Internally, the range of issues will involve every major executive department, as well as requiring support from Congress and the American people. The situation is sure to change rapidly and take many unexpected turns, which will call for a steadiness of vision combined with the ability to cope with new problems and seize new opportunities. Without this, rather than being agile, policy is likely to be either unresponsive or to drift.

Arrangements will be needed not only to formulate policy, but to implement and monitor it. The intensity and openness of communication within the executive branch will need to be high, and special coordination mechanisms will be required. Different administrations have used different models in the past, and they could be worth exploring.

If all the public accounts about this administration are correct, however, it has been sadly deficient in this regard, especially with monitoring and implementation. The task may be beyond this administration's

abilities, despite Secretary Gates bringing a new spirit to his office, and things are not likely to be better in the first 18 months or so of any new administration. Most transitions are littered with errors because it takes a while to gain experience and develop appropriate structures and habits.

Intelligence and priorities. As part of the necessary preparation, the US needs as good an idea as possible of how the various players see the situation, their interests, and each other. What is the Saudi assessment of its abilities to project force into Iraq, for example? How does Iran assess the various Shia factions? What does Assad see as the major dangers that developments in the region could pose to him and his regime? The effectiveness of American policy rests in part on understanding the vulnerabilities and opportunities the regional states have--and think they have. What does Syria's NIE on Iran look like, for example? How does Iran--or the various factions in Iran--analyze the situation in Lebanon?

Preparation must include an analysis of American interests and priorities. The US has to decide not only what it wants, but what is crucial and what it is willing to sacrifice.

Diplomacy. It is hard to imagine that the withdrawal of American troops will proceed without any discussion with regional powers, including Syria and Iran. While it is far from clear that these countries could bring peace to Iraq even if they wanted to, they can make things worse and, furthermore, without extensive communication if not coordination, we are likely to see inadvertent and undesired clashes between these countries, others in the region, and the US. It is easy for the US to specify what it would like from Iran and Syria; it is much more difficult to establish priorities and decide what it is willing to give up, especially because the willingness of these countries to reciprocate any American concessions remains unclear. Nevertheless, the US needs to think through what it would be willing to offer at various stages of the bargaining process. Most obviously, is the US willing to renounce regime change? Would it support Syria's goal of regaining the Golan Heights? Even more sensitively, would it be willing to permit Iran some uranium enrichment in return for intrusive inspection and cooperation on Iraq? (These questions also raise the topic of whether "grand bargains" with Syria or Iran are feasible or whether, once the US does engage, it should work on each issue separately.)

Presumably we would want the assistance of our EU allies, and, to a lesser extent, of Russia and the PRC. Here too we need intelligence to tell us how these states are likely to see the situation, what they will want, and what they are likely to seek from us. We will also need to think about what we may have to provide in order to gain their assistance, either in terms of adjusting our policy in the region or in terms of side-payments.

There surely will be calls to involve the UN. Is there a role for it other than being the site of negotiations? What sort of Security Council resolutions might the US want? It is hard to imagine a significant UN military force; is there anything else the UN might do?

Most countries believe--or at least argue--that progress on ameliorating the dispute between Israel and the Palestinians would reduce anti-Americanism, lower tensions in the region, and remove roadblocks to cooperation with regional powers. It could be argued that a stronger and more "even-handed" stance would help the US even if it did not yield concrete results. But in recent years the US has resisted deep involvement or significant pressure on Israel. If the situation in Iraq deteriorates and the need for regional cooperation grows, should the US be willing to alter its position? If it is, is there reason to expect much success?

Military preparation and covert action. Military preparation is of course also needed, and beyond my competence to discuss. Any withdrawal is likely to be perilous, and although putting forces back into Iraq will clearly be unattractive, we have to ask whether standing by could be even worse if regional powers become deeply involved. Even in the absence of the ability or need to put troops back in Iraq, what sort of military presence should the US seek in the region? Where would we be welcomed? One advantage of overthrowing Saddam was that we could withdraw troops from Saudi Arabia. Would it be wise, would it be possible, to put them back? What do we need, what could we get, from the Gulf states?

Covert action, both supporting friends and seeking to undermine adversaries, could be employed, although the extent of our capabilities is unclear. We have some ability to stir up trouble, and my guess is that we have played a role in the ethnic unrest in Iran in 2006. But doing more and replacing governments

requires a suitable local environment and this is lacking. Information operations, both overt and covert, can be helpful, but most recent American efforts have been clumsy and these instruments have their greatest effects over prolonged periods. I suspect that many actors in the region overestimate the potency of American covert action and its greatest role might be as a bargaining chip--the US might gain by promising not to engage in such endeavors. The problem, however, is that it is hard to make such commitments credible since these activities are hidden.

Economic preparations. Economic preparations are also clearly needed, most obviously to deal with the likely spike in oil prices. Under what conditions should the US release supplies from the strategic reserve? Is there anything the US could do to increase supplies from Russia or Nigeria? Would it be worthwhile to make concessions to Chavez? Should/could the US work with other consumers, especially the EU and the PRC, to try to ration scarce supplies? Is there a point in talking to OPEC ahead of time? What domestic plans should be developed to cushion the shock?

Humanitarian preparations. Humanitarian preparations are needed as well. Widespread fighting could disrupt food supplies, sanitation, and health facilities even more than is now the case. Although the fighting that led to Saddam's overthrow did not produce these expected consequences, they cannot be ruled out in the wake of large-scale regional unrest. Should relief supplies be stockpiled? Could international relief organizations get material into the country? Refugee flows might be reduced because so many Iraqis have left the country or moved into neighborhoods dominated by their religious group, but fighting could nevertheless induce people to move either to escape the fighting or because their areas are being subject to ethnic cleansing. Internal flows could prompt intervention by regional powers to protect their friends; external flows could produce refugee camps that would destabilize the host country and be used as bases for continued fighting in Iraq. Can anything be done ahead of time to minimize these flows or increase our capabilities to deal with them if they materialize? Can these efforts (and any subsequent humanitarian intervention) be done in a way that does not fuel the conflict, as has been true in many previous cases?

In the event of a collapse or large-scale fighting, some of the Iraqis who have cooperated with us are likely to seek asylum here. Are we ready to accommodate them? How can we prepare to do this without undercutting morale and prematurely stimulating an exodus?

Within Iraq

This section considers what the US could do to minimize the chances that its withdrawal will lead to chaos in Iraq.

The broad policy choices for political arrangements have been widely debated and little needs to be said about them here: extreme decentralization or power-sharing at the center; disarming militias or bringing them under government control; conciliating the Sunnis or supporting a Shia bloc. A few other points may be useful, however. First, although the debate about whether we are seeing a "real" civil war can degenerate into semantics, what is important is that the tactics appropriate to combating insurgency may feed sectarian violence. Most obviously, the presence of deep splits makes the prescription of building the Iraqi security forces not only difficult but perhaps counter-productive: the problem is not to build an Iraqi army, but to build an Iraqi army. We may know how to do the former; we have little idea about the latter, which may be impossible. As noted earlier, the recent military progress has not been accompanied by political reconciliation.

Second, while there is reason to seek settlement of various governance issues such as the distribution of oil profits before we go, we should not place too much faith in the permanence of these arrangements in the absence of outside enforcement. They are, after all, only paper agreements, and once we leave, each faction may yield to the temptation to renege and/or act aggressively out of the fear that others will. This means that even if the US and Iraqis are able to achieve a modicum of stability before the US leaves and even if the neighbors do not make trouble, we are not out of the woods. Narrowly, each Iraqi faction may hesitate to go first in fulfilling its obligations, fearing that if it begins to withdraw, disarm, or the like, others will take advantage of the temporary weakness and break the agreement; more broadly, each may fear that even if the terms are carried out, others will resume fighting if and when their strength

increases. Outsiders could play a helpful role here as purveyors of honest information and, even more—although with greater difficulty—as guarantors. In principle, they could promise to come to the assistance of the aggrieved party and threaten with retribution anyone who breaks the terms. In practice, this is difficult but perhaps not impossible. Sometimes indirect means could be employed—the US could tell the Kurds that it would protect them if and only if they did not declare formal independence, in somewhat the same way that it makes a conditional promise to Taiwan. Might Iran see it in its interest to tell its Shia allies that it would not protect them if they broke their agreements? As these examples show, it may be friends who are best positioned to provide guarantees because they are trusted, although they must not be so close to the client that they would never provide the necessary enforcement if the client misbehaves. Multinational groupings could also have high credibility as long as their members did not have a veto.

These contrivances are worth serious attention, but the probability remains that as it becomes clear that the US will no longer be around to enforce any arrangements that have been made, they are likely to become unstuck. The parties will have to rely on their own efforts, and while existing arrangements might mirror perceived and actual power, it is more likely that the factions' fears and ambitions will lead them to re-open many issues.

Chaos and regional instability will be minimized to the extent that the US can help broker an internal settlement that leaves the major parties at least minimally satisfied and, even more, permits each group to defend its position without being able to menace the others. In this respect, the population exchanges that are now occurring may be beneficial. But we should not expect too much. The groups have so far been unable to develop acceptable compromises, the rivalries go very deep, the factions are multiple, and many Sunnis remain unreconciled to being the minority.

At one point, the US might have been able to threaten to leave in order to pressure factions who wanted the US to stay (if we could have figured out what the factions' preferences were), but my guess is that all groups now believe that it is only a matter of time before the US leaves. We can still affect future developments by providing aid to various factions, and promising to do so provides some leverage. But

using it depends on greater knowledge of the capabilities and preferences of various groups than we are likely to have. In principle, we might try to give each group weapons and training that would allow it to protect its own position and neighborhood, thereby inducing a form of stability. But this sort of fine-tuning is not likely to be practicable.

A minimal level of peace and stability could follow American withdrawal if all the factions realize that the alternative is full-scale civil war, with all the costs and dangers that this brings (including likely intervention from the neighbors). Just as nuclear deterrence provided a form of stability during the Cold War, so the understanding that significant violence could spread might produce restraint. Whether this will be the case depends in part on the factions' estimates of the outcome of a civil war. Here uncertainties may be helpful: it is hard to see how any group could be confident of victory and easy for each to imagine extremely unpleasant outcomes. In principle, the US could enhance stability by giving each faction an exaggerated picture of the strength of the others or making it clear that it would use force to prevent any group from radically improving its position. But the former tactic is too clever and the latter is not likely to be credible.

Other complications stem from the fact that the violence does not seem to be under the control of the leaders. Even if they want to keep the lid on, spoilers or local groups can start violence that could easily escalate. It probably would be useful for the US to strengthen the control of the leaders, even troublesome ones like Sadr and Hakim, but this may not be possible. As American troops withdraw, my guess is that power will splinter even more than is the case now.

Nevertheless, the best (if not the only) hope for limiting the violence lies in the factions' fears that with American troops no longer around to keep the lid on, they could suffer badly in a civil war. Obviously these fears have not prevented other civil wars, although they may be responsible for the fact that there have not been more of them. In this case we may be aided by the fact that the major groupings are not united, which means that even if most Shias believe that they could defeat the Sunnis, they also realize that a Shia victory might not mean that their sub-group would end up on top. Factions and leaders presumably

understand that there are a lot of ways in which they can lose. But we cannot be too confident about the pacifying effects of fear. Factions that believe that their rivals are inhibited by the dread of civil war will feel free to engage in provocations, so the sense of too much stability would be dangerous. The other end of the continuum is just as dangerous and more likely: if the factions believe that civil war is inevitable, they are likely to act in a way that brings it on. It is not clear that the US has much influence over the control of expectations, hopes, and fears.

Regional Powers

What gives the situation in Iraq the potential to turn into such a disaster is the involvement of the neighbors. The ray of light is that, like the Iraqi factions, none of them can be confident of a happy outcome if violence spreads. Iran and perhaps Syria could imagine an outcome that would leave them better off than they are now, but even they must realize the situation could turn menacing. My sense is that the regional countries are driven more by fears than hopes, which at least opens the door to the possibility of helpful cooperation. Turkey cares most about preventing Kurdish independence; Saudi Arabia about limiting Shia dominance and seeing that the Sunnis are not slaughtered or chased from the country; Syria and Jordan worry about refugee flows and large-scale violence on their borders. Each country obviously wants to maximize its influence over Iraq, but its becoming a failed state, let alone a terrorist base, would menace all of them. How much influence each has is far from clear, however, especially when it comes to exercising restraint. We should not be too quick to equate outside interference with outside influence: proxies are rarely passive and even knowledgeable outsiders like Iran may end up being more manipulated than manipulators. There is both bad news and good news here. On the one hand, Iran may not be able to restrain their clients if they want to; on the other hand, greater power gained by Shia factions with close ties to Iran may not translate into greater Iranian influence in Iraq, let alone in the wider region.

Furthermore, what each does presumably depends in part on its beliefs about what others are doing. Competitive interference is likely to build on itself. Since each country will be suspicious of the others, each is likely to overestimate what others are doing. Intervention and escalation are more likely to

come from the country that believes that its friends are losing, although strong action to solidify a victory is also possible. Two related dynamics are especially likely and quite troublesome. One is "window" thinking in which one or more country thinks that now is a timely moment to act, but if it does not the opportunity will pass and, worse yet, its adversaries will soon be in a position to take the initiative. Second and relatedly, each neighbor can believe that the others are about to intervene. While mutual restraint might be the preferred outcome, it will be unreachable if each fears that the others are going to act. UN or other neutral observers might play a useful role by increasing transparency, but only the most visible kinds of interference, such as the deployment of troops or "volunteers", are likely to be detectable. Under some circumstances, American intelligence could reassure regional countries that their neighbors are not deeply involved, but given the limitations of US capabilities and the existence of a great deal of mistrust, not much can be expected here.

Of course the US—and perhaps many of the neighbors—might seek arrangements whereby everyone tries to restrain the factions in Iraq over which they have most influence. Chaos and disruption would be held to a minimum and each regional state would retain some influence and avoid the outcome it fears most. Constructing such an arrangement would presumably be the point of engaging in intensive regional diplomacy, but it would require a great deal of common interest, trust, and transparency.

Four Kinds Of American Choices Toward Neighbors

US strategy confronts four kinds of choices toward the neighbors. First, should we seek regional cooperation or do we want the neighbors to be deeply divided from each other? Should we encourage a regional conference, a regional standing group to facilitate as much communication as possible, and work toward informal understandings if not formal agreements? Even if this is advisable, could the US (and its allies) actually do much in this regard? Iran and Syria have developed closer ties in recent years. Is this useful or, if not, can we reverse it by astute diplomacy? Would it be better—or necessary—to treat them as a unit? (In the 1950s, Dulles and Eisenhower treated our main adversaries as one not because they believed the Sino-Soviet bloc was solid, but because they felt that making each share the risks of being

associated with the other would generate frictions between them.)

Second, to increase its influence and stabilize the region, should the US seek grand bargains with Syria and Iran? If these countries' cooperation could be secured by meeting their aspirations, is this a price we should pay? Would the US be willing to drop its resistance to Syrian domination of Lebanon?

Third, should the US seek to orient its policy toward supporting Sunnis against Shia in the region, taking advantage of the shared interest of many of our friends in containing Iran? There are some indications that we are moving in this direction.

Fourth, what threats should the US be prepared to make--and carry out--to try to influence and counter-act the neighbors? This question is another way of asking what our red lines are. Under what circumstances would the US use force, either the reintroduction of ground forces into Iraq or strikes against interfering countries? Of course in recent years the US has had to tolerate things it said were intolerable, but would we use force to prevent the establishment of an Iranian-dominated regime in Baghdad? What could we do to make credible any threats to prevent this? If the slaughter or expulsion of the Sunnis were to trigger Saudi intervention (assuming any real Saudi capability), would the US have to intervene to prevent a regional war? Could the US afford to let the situation spin out of control in the expectation that regional balance of power dynamics would come into play and prevent any one-sided outcome, and that any American intervention could be reserved for later stages when the local and regional participants were ready to settle?

Scenarios

Even if the future of Iraq and the region cannot be predicted, a few scenarios may help clarify thinking. I exclude the possibility of a stable and friendly Iraq on the grounds that this is extremely unlikely, and there would be no need for further thinking if it were to occur. None of these scenarios include American or European actions because the point of this Working Paper is to stimulate thinking about these questions. This is fortunate because I'm not sure what I would recommend.

For the alternatives, I could imagine two variants, one in which the situation starts to badly

deteriorate only after all American troops have left and the other where these developments occur while significant deployments are on the ground. In the former case, the US will have to decide whether or not to put troops back in; in the latter case the first decision will be whether to speed their withdrawal, to concentrate on force protection and keep a low profile, or to actively intervene.

The scenarios, only briefly sketched, are listed in rough order of bad to worst.

1a. LOW-LEVEL TURMOIL

This scenario projects a situation not unlike that prevailing now, although characterized more by uncertainty and confusion. Nothing terribly dramatic happens as the US leaves because no faction is confident enough to launch an all-out offensive or fearful enough to need to act preemptively. The central government is weak, but does not dissolve. The Kurds take a little more territory. The neighbors, especially Iran, seek to increase their influence, but avoid open confrontations. Most observers believe that the situation is unstable. Can the US and others do anything to solidify this fragile configuration?

1b. SHIA-SUNNI VIOLENCE CONTINUES, BUT IS MITIGATED BY THE FACT THAT THE POPULATIONS HAVE MOVED SO THAT NEIGHBORHOODS ARE HOMOGENEOUS.

Neighboring states interfere only enough to stay in the game; they act more defensively than offensively, and their impulses are restrained by the expectation that others will match any escalation. Some terrorist facilities develop in Sunni-dominated areas, but the unpopularity of foreign fighters limits these activities.

This situation, probably the best imaginable, would minimally satisfy American interests, but it is not likely to be stable, resting as it does on each faction's and neighbor's caution. What, if anything, can and should the US do to help? Should the US threaten to reintroduce forces if stability is lost? Would this merely be an inducement to some groups to provoke greater violence? What should be the American stance toward Syria and Iran?

2a. A DETERIORATING SITUATION

The situation is not stable as the US leaves. Sunni factions see that they will be marginalized if not

destroyed if events continue on the current trajectory; Shia factions, although squabbling among themselves, believe that they must permanently ensure Shia rule. At least for the time being, the Kurds stay out, but Shia-Sunni violence escalates, including clashes between armed formations and local massacres. The violence smolders rather than bursts into a conflagration, however, as both sides respect a number of "red lines." In one variant, the Sunnis, being better organized and better armed, make significant progress, partly thanks to recent American assistance. At this point Iran steps up its arming of the Shias, who soon gain the upper hand. In a second variant the Shias do well from the start and the Saudis fund and provide arms to the Sunnis. In either case, refugee flows to the neighbors increase, placing a burden on them and leading to the establishment of armed camps which develop the capability to raid back across the border into Iraq. Terrorist groups gain a footing in the Sunni areas as the foreign fighters are seen as necessary.

Could/should the US try to establish "safe havens" or "catch basins" for refugees? Could our forces sharply limit the flows of men and material from the neighbors, especially Iran? Would the Europeans and other interested but not neighboring states such as Pakistan and Egypt provide peacekeeping forces? Presumably a necessary condition would be a local ceasefire, which is unlikely. There is a chance that the increased turmoil would lead many Iraqi factions to draw back from the brink, preferring a situation described in scenario 1 to what for them would be a cosmic roll of the dice. But the fears and temptations are likely to be great, and there are many local groups or spoilers who could upset a bargained solution. What leverage does the US have and how might it use it? Is it feasible to get the neighbors to exercise restraint? Presumably a necessary although not a sufficient condition for this would be to ensure that none of the major factions are put at too much of a disadvantage.

How would countries like the PRC and Russia react to this situation? They might continue to stay on the sidelines, but could also see both opportunities and dangers.

What would be the likely response of the oil market?

Would American opinion favor washing our hands of the mess or would there be support for a

more active policy?

2b. A FAILED STATE

The central government loses all authority, but violence is limited as the three main regions are able to maintain local order. After some fierce fighting Baghdad undergoes a de facto partition, but no one recognizes the units as independent, the boundaries between them witness frequent skirmishes, and control in both the Sunni and Shia areas is limited. Crime and terrorism flourish; the economy is miserable and only aid from abroad permits anything more than subsistence.

No one believes the situation is stable, but even Iran doubts its ability to bring about much order. Sadr hopes to reestablish central control, but his influence is diminished. There is unrest on the Iranian border, and Sunni extremists and foreign fighters slip over the border to support their religious counterparts in Saudi Arabia. Some oil companies make deals with local leaders, especially in Kurdistan, but while all seek to position themselves for eventual entry, few think that the current situation can last.

3a. OPEN CIVIL WAR

In this scenario, Iraqi security forces break apart initially along Shia-Sunni-Kurdish lines, but eventually into sub-factions. Militias and the armed forces become indistinguishable and central authority disappears. American soldiers embedded in Iraqi units are killed, and the local redistribution of ethnic groups that occurred in 2006-07 is no longer sufficient and large-scale ethnic cleansing and segregation takes place, with particularly fierce fighting in Baghdad.

Neighboring states supply not only arms and intelligence, but small military formations and the limited use of air power. Saudi Arabia demands that the US help protect the Sunnis; it also exchanges threats with Iran. Israel warns that it will not stand idly by if Iranian power is extended to Iraq. Egged on by Iran, there is unrest among the Shia in eastern Saudi Arabia and there are clashes in Lebanon.

3b. CIVIL AND INTERNATIONAL WAR

As violence spreads in Iraq, the neighbors believe it is now or never. Driven both by the desire to salvage their interests and the hopes of enhancing them, the neighbors bolster their local allies. As each

matches the efforts of the other, escalation is rapid. Refugee flows are very large, both within Iraq and across borders. Seeking to take advantage of the chaos, the Kurds offer support to the Shia in return for Shia acquiescence in Kurdish independence. The Kurdish calculation that this also carries with it implicit Iranian approval which will be enough to deter Turkey proves incorrect and Turkey sends forces across the border. Jordan seizes a buffer zone in western Iraq, and unrest spreads to Syria as the Sunni majority sees the Assad regime aiding in the crushing of their Iraqi brethren. With Karzai's assassination, Afghanistan slips into chaos, and Pakistan steps up its support of the Taliban.

Sunni-Shia violence increases throughout the region, and a renewed civil war in Lebanon prompts Israeli intervention. Saudi Arabia and Iran launch air attacks against each other's cities. Oil production slumps and oil prices hit \$120 per barrel.

Concluding Remarks

These scenarios may be flawed in presenting a too-simple picture of uniformly increasing levels of violence. While I think it is likely that increased violence in Iraq would draw the neighbors in, this is not the only possibility. We often think of violence as being contagious, but the medical analogy is not appropriate because we are dealing with actors who think strategically and can look ahead. Factions in Lebanon, for example, might draw back in response to large-scale fighting in Iraq; Syria might reach out to the West in response to dangerous developments in the region.

This analysis may also be too simple in slighting likely strategic interactions. Each of the actors will presumably try not only to influence others, but to anticipate how they will respond to its actions. At times, this can produce deterrence; under other circumstances it can lead actors to try to beat others to the punch. More complex patterns are also possible, as actors try to anticipate the likely second-order effects of their behavior. To what extent, for example, will various Shia factions be restrained by the expectation that large-scale violence will limit their power through increasing Iranian intervention and influence? Might the Sunnis try to take advantage of such Shia fears by threatening to take actions to bring Iran in unless the Shia made concessions? How does Hezbollah believe that possible outcomes in Iraq would affect its

fortunes?

In all this, the US needs to consider its bottom lines, red lines, and exit lines. We need to rank our priorities and try to determine what interests are both vital and within reach, and what, conversely, we are willing to sacrifice. Can we both freeze Iran out of the nuclear business and get its support in Iraq? (Of course we may not be able to do either.) Can we make a "grand bargain" with Syria, and what would we be willing to give up to do so?

Relatedly, we need to think about our red lines--i.e., what outcomes are so unacceptable that we would be willing to go all out to try to prevent them. Are we willing to use force to delay Iran's nuclear program, even at the cost of (presumably) leading Iran to retaliate in the region and make more trouble in Iraq? Would we put troops back into Iraq to prevent the formation of what we think would be a pro-Iranian government? Could we demolish terrorist training camps from the air or would we need boots on the ground, even assuming we could get the necessary local and political logistical support to allow us to do this?

We also need to consider what should or would drive us to leave the region. Could circumstances get so complex and dire that we should simply leave in the sense of foregoing all military options and perhaps even assertive diplomacy? This option might be chosen either because leaders felt it was appropriate or because public opinion demanded it. Our presence in the region is often a lightning rod and permits local actors both to blame us for everything that goes wrong and to shirk their responsibilities.

I regret not having many answers, but think that it is useful to at least raise the questions and I hope stimulate thinking.